



At one of MKA's four volunteer-operated concessions areas, note the center counter display holding the day's special food item. A behind-scenes support kitchen turns out food items for the front counter.

nothin' but NET

Photos by Eric Brandt

Ducks fans visiting the new Matthew Knight Arena at the University of Oregon can nosh on everything from popcorn to lobster thanks to a foodservice operation that combines flexibility, creativity and volume.

F By Janice Cha
 oodservice planners involved in the new Matthew Knight Arena at the University of Oregon in Eugene faced a tall order. The arena's foodservice operations had to be flexible enough to quickly serve crowds as large as 12,000 or as small as 1,000 with equal panache. They had to offer a variety of quality food choices, from traditions created at the beloved old McArthur Court to new upscale options. In addition, they had to be located to cover the entire arena. And all of it had to happen without raising prices.

By all accounts, they've achieved the slam-dunk, offering everything from popcorn to lobster, covering the arena, and doing it without raising the prices.

The \$200 million, 12,541-seat Matthew Knight Arena opened in January after nearly 10 years in planning and three in design and construction. The

FACT BOX

MENU/SEGMENT: University arena foodservice

OUTLETS: 4 public concessions areas, 2 private club restaurants, 1 private concessions area, 6 carts and 4 cart/kiosk 'hybrid' locations

ESTIMATED 2011 GROSS SALES: \$1.3 million

ARENA SEATS: 12,541

COST TO BUILD ARENA: \$220 million

FOODSERVICE EQUIPMENT COST: \$2.37 million for equipment & concession carts

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON: Eric Brandt, director of food & hospitality services for UO Athletic Department

ARCHITECTS: TVA, Portland, Ore., and Ellerbe Becket, San Francisco.

CONSULTANT: William Caruso & Associates, Denver—William Caruso, principal; Stephen Young, designer; Marcin Zmiejko, Sr., project manager

EQUIPMENT SUPPLY & DESIGN: Curtis Restaurant Equipment, Springfield, Ore.—Steve Denison

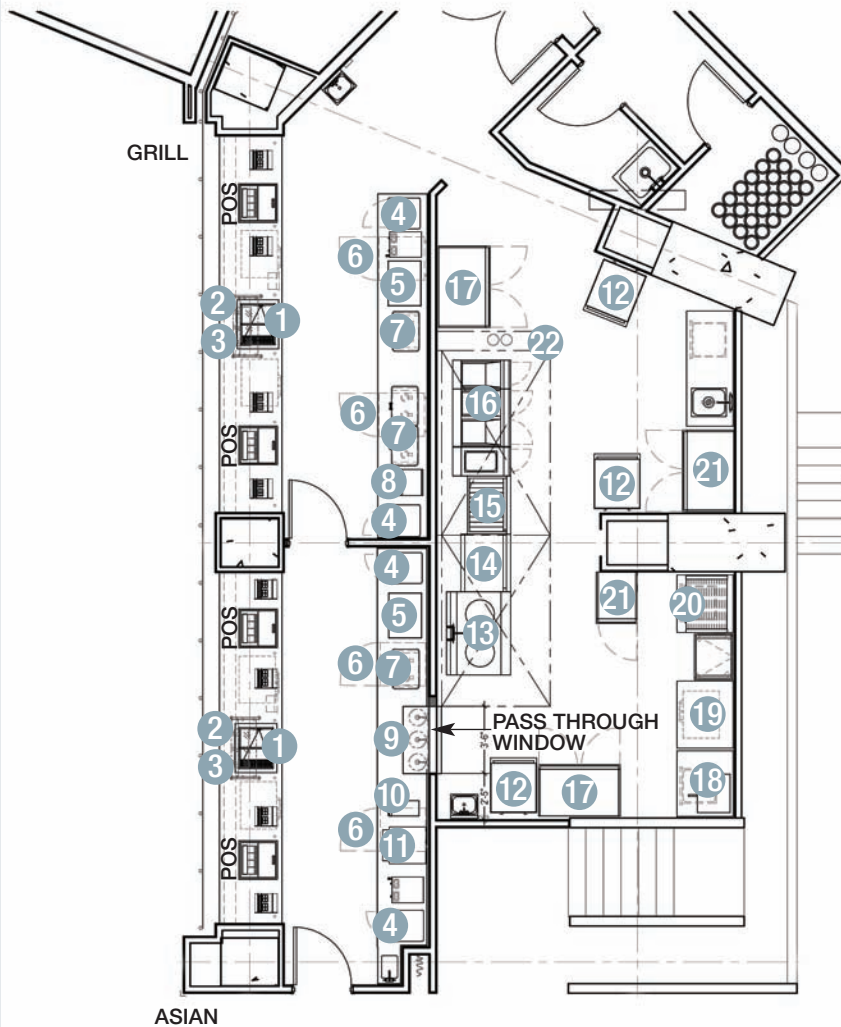
PROJECT MANAGER: JMI Sports, Eugene, Ore.



Matthew Knight Arena

Matthew Knight Arena—Grill & Asian Concession Stand

EQUIPMENT LIST



- 1 English Mfg. sneeze guard
- 2 Delfield drop-in hot/cold well
- 3 Hatco heat lamp
- 4 J&J Snack Foods heated pretzel display
- 5 Gold Medal popcorn warmer
- 6 Delfield undercounter freezer
- 7 Vollrath chafer
- 8 Hatco French fry dump station
- 9 Hatco heat lamp
- 10 Gehl's nacho cheese dispenser
- 11 Hatco nacho chip warmer
- 12 Cres-Cor warming cabinet
- 13 Jade wok range
- 14 Jade griddle
- 15 Jade charbroiler
- 16 Jade fryer
- 17 Delfield reach-in freezer
- 18 J&J Snack Foods pretzel oven
- 19 Hatco warming drawer
- 20 Nemco hot dog grill
- 21 Delfield reach-in refrigerator
- 22 Halton hood

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MKA's volunteer-run concessions support; kitchens have been outfitted with "basic cooking equipment that can be operated with a minimum of training," Brandt says.

arena plays multiple positions in Eugene: It's the new home of the UO men's (go Ducks!) and women's basketball teams—but it will also host concerts and performances such as Disney Live, comedian Jeff Dunham, singer Elton John and the Original Harlem Globetrotters. On top of that, the MKA is expected to receive LEED Gold certification for its sustainable design and construction materials, making it the first "green" sporting facility in the nation.

"The Matthew Knight Arena has put us a lot closer to professional arenas as far as sports entertainment goes," says Eric Brandt, director of food and hospitality services at the University of Oregon's Athletic Department, who helped shape MKA foodservice along with a design team that included consultants William Caruso & Associates, architects TVA and Ellerbe Becket

and dealer/designer Curtis Foodservice Equipment.

Goals & Challenges

MKA foodservice planners were tasked with three primary goals as they created the foodservice infrastructure. They had to maintain UO food traditions from the old "Mac" Court, promote the university's brand, and at the same time, add innovation.

Continuing food traditions was the easy part. Hot dogs and popcorn were Mac Court's top sellers, so planners made sure MKA concessions outlets would be well equipped to sell plenty of both. "Few people come to sports venues expecting quiche," Brandt says.

One challenge, however, was how to make sure popcorn was top-of-mind for visitors. "When you walked into the old Mac

Court, the first thing you'd notice was the smell of popcorn," Brandt says. To keep that effect at the new arena (with its vast interior space and ceiling heights), Brandt spec'd three large popping machines and positioned them in vending carts near main entries. "When you walk into MKA, the [immediate] smell, sound and sight of the poppers helps evoke the old court."

Second, brand. The University of Oregon has been a leader in upscale sporting-event fare for at least 10 years, when it expanded the football stadium and accompanying foodservice operations.

"We added about 20 items to the traditional stadium food menu, such as bratwurst, deli sandwiches, root beer floats and espresso drinks," Brandt says. MKA menu offerings are just as broad. "Sports has become so much more than just the event. It's also about the experience, the food, the setting—all that combined is what sets UO sports apart from other schools."

A nod to the UO brand—and tradition—appears in the names of the concession stands and menu items. To name a few examples: The Admiral concessions area, named after a 1930's UO basketball star who went on to serve in the U.S. Navy, offers Buzzer Beater Bratwurst and yakisoba; Uncle Phil's, named after UO benefactor Phil Knight (of Nike fame), features The Mighty Duck hot dog; and Daisy's Diner, named after a woman's booster group, specializes in Three-Point Nachos and Hardwood Burgers.

On the innovation side, Brandt's team has introduced "guest chef specials" at every event, regardless of how much of the facility is in use. Local restaurant chefs are invited to work with the arena to add their signature items to the roster, a move that will add "enormous variety over time," Brandt says. Accordingly, each of the four concession stands' front counters is equipped with well-lit hot and cold food displays to spotlight the special food offerings.

"For small events of, say, 1,000 people, only one of the four concessions locations would be open for service," Brandt says. "That means 75% of the menu is no longer available. The guest chef special is a way to add variety and local expression."

From Combis To Smokers

Making foodservice readily available throughout a 405,000-sq.-ft. facility, spread across three levels, with soaring ceilings and long concourses is no mean feat. The MKA operation does it with a commissary kitchen, four concession stands supported by two kitchens, six food carts, four hybrid cart-concession arrangements supported by a kitchen, and two high-end club restaurants, each with its own self-sufficient kitchen and foodservice operations.

All MKA basketball action takes place on the Event Level, one floor below ground. That level also is home to the arena's commissary kitchen. The kitchen handles hot and cold bulk-food prep for all of the arena's retail outlets and catering. Specialty cooking equipment not usually found in stadium kitchens includes a smoker, roll-in combi ovens, cook-hold

ovens, tilting-braising pan, tilting kettle, conveyor oven and the usual grill, charbroiler and fryer. In pursuit of the arena's LEED Gold certification, kitchen equipment was spec'd to Energy Star standards wherever possible.

Pre-prepped and par-cooked food from the commissary is transported in a fleet of carts via elevator and service corridors to concession stands one and two levels up. The commissary area also includes warewashing, chilled and dry storage, administrative offices and the loading dock.

On the same level as the commissary and the Ducks' court are MKA's two private dining facilities for university donors: the McArthur Club and the more exclusive Founders Club. Each has a fully equipped kitchen, prep area and walk-ins that allow them to operate without commissary support. A private concessions area serving beer, hot dogs, popcorn, nachos and other favorite sports fare links the space between the two clubs.

The larger McArthur Club can host parties of up to 1,200 guests. The "Mac Club" kitchen is geared to large-batch, buffet-style food production. Since the kitchen would be used by a variety of organizations, planners spec'd extra, lockable, walk-in coolers and freezers for use by outside caterers.

So Nice 'I Might Cry'

The Founders Club—did we mention it's exclusive?—seats 140 to 160 and is reserved for the university's top-echelon donors. This restaurant-within-a-stadium features a fully equipped open kitchen led by Chef Jason Boyer.

Founders Club guests can order their food at the Chef's Counter, which includes two sandwich prep areas, conveyor toaster, hot wells and a food warmer. Immediately behind, also in full view of guests, is the cookline with its range, griddles and fryers. A wall hides the kitchen's heavy-duty, less sexy equipment: braising pan, convection oven, warming cabinets, a work table and a food processor. Also included are reach-in refrigerators

The MKA's commissary kitchen includes such equipment as a tilting-braising skillet, tilting kettle and combi ovens along with the usual grills, charbroilers and fryers.





A wok range (l.) is used for stir-fried noodles at the MKA's Asian-themed concessions stand. The high-tech popcorn cart (below) is one of three units strategically positioned near the arena's main entrances to fill the air with the smell, sound and sight of popcorn.



and freezers, beverage stations and a warewashing area.

"As the Founders Club kitchen was being finished, I brought Chef Boyer in for a look," Brandt says. "He stood for a long minute with a big smile on his face. Then he said, 'I think I might cry.'"

One level up, as people enter the MKA on the Main Concourse level, they're met by the aroma of that previously mentioned freshly popped popcorn being sold from well-appointed carts. Other units—mobile but so large that they generally stay in one spot for most of the season—include two Café Duck Espresso carts, a bakery cart and a frozen treat cart. They're equipped with POS systems, water tanks for hand-washing, and all necessary equipment needed for the concept.

The Main Concourse houses the arena's concessions, which, with their themes and variety, resemble food courts more than anything else. The concessions areas include The Admiral and The Pitstop on the east side, and Daisy's Diner and Uncle Phil's on the west. Each outlet has six to eight POS stations. The two west-side counters each measure nearly 40' in length, while the smaller east-side counters measure 29' and 37' in length.

"Front-of-house" equipment (i.e., visible to the public) includes the Guest Chef Special displays, popcorn warmers, hot pretzel display cases and beverage dispensers. Behind the counter, a wall with a pass-through window hides finishing kitchens equipped with griddles, fryers, ovens and reach-ins, but also such pieces as woks, pretzel ovens, hot dog grills, warming ovens.

An Odd Challenge

Designers faced an unusual operational challenge where the concessions outlets were concerned: The crews working in the support kitchens wouldn't be trained foodservice workers so much as volunteers from various booster groups—often a different set of

people for each event. Training in the usual sense would be virtually impossible.

The solution was to outfit these kitchens with "basic cooking equipment that can be operated with a minimum of training," Brandt says. The wall behind the concession area's back counter blocks customer views of cooking activity on purpose. For one thing, it improves use of limited space, but it also boosts customer perception of food quality.

"With a volunteer workforce, it's tough to get them to dress the part of chefs," Brandt says, laughing.

The Upper Level

Ducks fans on the MKA's Upper Concourse can buy classic stadium fare from four hybrid cart/kiosk locations. The four outlets were the direct result of value engineering.

"The building engineers asked for foodservice outlets that 'didn't weigh as much' while they were designing the support structure for the upper level," Brandt explains. The greater the weight, the greater the expense in structural support materials.

The solution was to create "niche" marketing outlets. Each outlet consists of a 3'-deep counter alcove in the outside wall outfitted with hand sink, food display equipment and beverage dispensers. A cart serves as the front counter holding the POS station and condiments. To supplement (and speed) beverage sales, the design team added eight vending machines throughout the upper level.

"This was a way to do the right thing for the building—and for the fans," Brandt says. The menu includes hot dogs, pretzels, popcorn, pizza and nachos. "We figured fans could buy fancier food on the Main Concourse on their way up if they wanted."

Despite their wheels, the Upper Concourse carts are permanent fixtures. "Their exteriors were crafted to match the building décor, with oversized black-and-white photos of UO sports history," Brandt says.

A month into operations, the "niche" outlets are doing so well that Brandt is already considering adding one or two more. "This is definitely an area of growth," he says. ●